

The Nation

SALT Prospects Are Linked to Missiles for Europe

The perceived uncertainty of Washington's leadership among the Western allies may, in the end, turn out to be one of the strongest arguments in favor of SALT.

West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt observed recently that the arms limitation treaty had been negotiated with the Soviets by three American Presidents; if it were rejected now by the Senate, he said, United States leadership "as regards the West as a whole" would suffer "a disastrous blow." President Carter emphatically agreed last week: "Some European countries," he said, "might very well turn toward the Soviet Union and put an anchor out to the East, and weaken in the process our NATO alliance."

That, essentially, was the argument used last week by the Administration in trying to convince such strong North Atlantic Treaty Organization supporters as Senator Sam Nunn, Democrat of Georgia, to vote for the treaty. But the defense argument has a further wrinkle — also nuclear, negative and vital. If Washington acutely disappoints its allies on SALT, what incentive remains for the Europeans to accept on their soil new medium-range American Pershing missiles as a counterweight to improved Soviet missiles that can strike Europe?

Addressing both the nervous Europeans as well as potential Senate converts to SALT, President Carter seemed to go out of his way to de-

nounce the Russians as militaristic, atheistic and totalitarian. He turned down Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev's offer to pull out some missiles, tanks and troops from East Germany (it required the United States to drop its plan for basing Pershings in Europe). "In effect," Mr. Carter said, the Brezhnev proposal "is to continue their own rate of modernization provided we don't modernize at all."

Atlantic Alliance ministers are expected to decide on the missiles in December. National security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, warned last week that their refusal to accept the Pershings could lead to political intimidation by Moscow, "at best and even war at worst." Bonn has agreed to take the new ground-based cruise and Pershing II missiles — if "a" West European neighbor follows suit. Belgium has said it would, subject to parliamentary approval; Dutch left-wingers are strongly opposed.

The Administration, meanwhile, tried to hurry the Senate toward action on SALT II. But Foreign Relations Committee chairman Senator Frank Church said ratification must hinge on a further Presidential affirmation that Soviet troops in Cuba "are not engaged in a combat role."

The Administration still was ducking a clear commitment on raising future defense spending by more than 3 percent (now planned), a price some key Senators set for their pro-SALT votes. Promising to submit the main points of 1981-to-1985 budget plans, Defense Secretary Harold R. Brown left open the possibility of new increases.

Senate majority leader Robert C. Byrd hopes to begin floor debate around Nov. 1. A sign of how close the call can be came in an closed-door committee vote on Friday; a motion to postpone action in the generally pro-treaty foreign relations panel was defeated, but by 10 to 5.